

AN  
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A N S W E R  
TO THE

REV. MR. HARRIS'S

"SCRIPTURAL RESEARCHES ON THE LICITNESS OF  
THE SLAVE-TRADE."

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By the REV. W. HUGHES, M.A.

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THROUGH COVETOUSNESS SHALL THEY WITH FEIGNED WORDS  
MAKE MERCHANDIZE OF YOU.

2<sup>d</sup> EP. PETER, CHAP. ii. VER. 3.

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L O N D O N:

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M DCC LXXXVIII.



TO  
W. PLUMER, Esq.  
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR THE COUNTY OF  
HERTFORD,  
THE FRIEND OF MAN, AND OF  
HUMAN LIBERTY,  
THIS ATTEMPT TO VINDICATE THAT  
LIBERTY,  
IS, WITH THE GREATEST RESPECT, INSCRIBED,  
BY HIS MOST OBEDIENT,  
AND MOST HUMBLE SERVANT,  
THE AUTHOR.

W. P. M. E. E. E.

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A PAMPHLET has lately appeared, under the very extraordinary title of “Scriptural Researches on the *Licitness* of the Slave Trade,” &c. which is said to have given great occasion of triumph to those who are enemies to its abolition, and to have alarmed the minds of some worthy persons who are friends to that measure. Not fearing that any

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injury to the cause of humanity, could arise from quotations or fair arguments drawn from the Scriptures on this subject; I, at first, heard of the publication with indifference; but finding, some time after, that it was regarded by many as a work of some plausibility at least, I had the curiosity to read it. The perusal of it confirmed me in my former opinion of the invalidity of the Author's arguments; and I discovered also, that in some passages he had evidently misrepresented the meaning of Scripture. Shocked at the idea of slavery's being defended upon such principles, and considering that silence, on the part of the friends of mankind, might be deemed a proof of conviction, or, at least, of inability to reply, I determined to attempt to give an answer to these researches; and, whether I

have confuted the arguments of this Author or not, the Publick must judge. I have not thought it necessary to imitate the artificial and scientifick method of my Author : truth is mighty in itself, and needs not, in its support, the sophistry of learning, the quibbles of metaphysicks, or the dexterous arts of logick. I am not sanguine enough to expect that my arguments will convince a single trader in human flesh of the unlawfulness of his pursuits ; for I am not so ignorant of mankind as to be unconscious how little any considerations of morality and religion will weigh with such a class of men, when interest is placed in the opposite scale. It is possible, however, that some, who join with me in reprobating the slave-trade, may be confirmed in their just abhorrence of it ; and that others, who

are struck with a panick at the affected solemnity, the pompous parade of knowledge of the Scriptures, and ostentatious display of the powers of reasoning, which are not very sparingly dispersed in the researches, may find their fears somewhat relieved by a perusal of this Reply.

The Author endeavours to vindicate the slave-trade, by citing the examples of the Patriarchs and the precepts of the Levitical law; and, lastly, by shewing, that is, in his own way, its conformity with the principles of the Christian dispensation.

With regard to the Patriarchs, it is obvious enough to answer, that though they had the light of natural reason to direct them, yet it was only a dim light, which has often failed to direct them

them how to proceed, without deviation, in the paths of virtue. The social duties, the obligation that all men are under to do all possible good to their fellow-creatures, of whatever nation or religion they may happen to be, seem never to have been well understood, nor generally practised before the Christian æra. The perfect knowledge of them was reserved as one of the distinguished blessings of the new covenant. Christ speaks of himself as inculcating duties which were before unknown to the world: "A new commandment," says he, "I give unto you, that ye love one another." To ask why the Almighty did not inform the Patriarchs, that to trade in slaves was an inhuman custom with which they ought not to comply, would be altogether as impertinent as to ask, why He did not teach them many duties

of which they were ignorant, or why He did not instruct them in all the articles of the Christian faith. The Supreme Being only can judge in what degree the minds of men ought to be illuminated in any particular period of time; and it may surely be affirmed, without giving offence to any one, that "even the patriarchal ages were," comparatively speaking, times of darkness and ignorance\*.

I shall now, following our Author's division of the subject, proceed more particularly to consider the case of Abraham and Hagar.

\* The Researcher has weakened his own cause by considering Abraham and Joseph merely as disciples of the religion of nature, the religion of Socrates and Cicero.

ABRA-



## A B R A H A M.

From the history of Abraham and Hagar, the Researcher attempts to prove, that the Supreme Being interposed his authority to give a sanction to the slave-trade ; and to this end, he represents the Almighty as dispatching an Angel from heaven, for the sole purpose of commanding a servant-maid, who had eloped from her mistress, to return to her. Truly a most important errand ! Whoever reads the sixteenth chapter of Genesis with attention, will find reason to think that God had higher objects in view.

Ishmael, according to the design of Providence, was to become a great nation : Hagar, his mother, when big with child of him, had forsaken her



master's house, and being a slave and a stranger in the land, without home or protector, her own destruction, and that of her child, were in the highest degree probable. To prevent this destruction, and to second the designs of Providence in making Ishmael a great nation, an Angel was sent with a message to Hagar. In this account of the matter, an important end is to be answered, worthy of the interposition of Providence.

Our Author affirms that the conduct of Hagar, in flying from her mistress, was condemned by the representative of God. Not a syllable of this appears in Scripture, unless indeed the reader can find it, as the Researcher has done, in these words: "And he," the Angel, "said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence comest

comest thou? and whither wilt thou go?" And she said, " I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai." And the Angel of the Lord said unto her, " Return unto thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands." Here is not a word of condemnation, or even of reproof. That slavery must be afflicting and severe indeed, which, to a person in Hagar's forlorn and wretched condition, would not be a state of relief from greater ills; nor could the most tender friend give kinder advice than the Angel did to Hagar, or express that advice in terms more free from reproach. Yet this Author affirms, that the conduct of Hagar was condemned by the Angel, and triumphs exceedingly on having found a passage in Scripture so strongly in favour of the cause which he has undertaken to defend; and avers, that

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“ were all other scriptural evidences wanted in favour of the slave-trade, this decree alone of the highest Court of Justice possible, this solemn sentence of the Supreme Judge of right and wrong, &c. must convince every impartial reader, that the licitness of that trade is evidently warranted by the written word of God.” It will be time enough to reply to this pompous inanity, when the Researcher has the goodness to inform us, where this decree of the highest Court of Justice possible, and this solemn sentence of the Supreme Judge of right and wrong, are to be found recorded. They certainly are not to be found in the Scripture history of Abraham and Hagar. Our Author proceeds now to give us a very surprising piece of information indeed: “ The slave-trade, *even when attended with circumstances*

*stances not altogether conformable to the feelings of humanity, is essentially consistent with the sacred and inalienable rights of justice, and has the positive sanction of God in its support\*."* I thank God, that my idea of justice is as different from this as light from darkness; and think the Author most highly culpable in thus dishonouring his Maker, by affirming, that the Almighty God has not only given a sanction to the slave-trade, but also to that cruelty and oppression which too generally attend it.

The intelligent Reader will perceive, that in the case of Hagar, our Author

\* To attempt thus to weaken the conviction which men have of the moral attributes of the Deity, is to endeavour to sap the very foundation of all religion. I beg pardon; to weaken the conviction which men have of the moral attributes, cannot be in the least injurious to a very ancient and venerable religion—the worship of the Devil.

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has said a great deal about the lawfulness of the slave-trade, but proved nothing.

## J O S E P H.

The history of Joseph is next referred to, as proving that that Patriarch's reducing a nation of free men to the condition of slaves, was agreeable to the will of God.

With regard to the character of Joseph, it was, no doubt, in most cases exemplary; and I am willing to allow that the Patriarch, from his general conduct, deserved all those praises which this Author has so liberally bestowed upon him: yet there is one fact which sullies his fame; a fact which can never be considered as consistent with humanity: The fact is this, the Patriarch, foreseeing a time of dearth, had wisely provided

provided a remedy for the evil, by laying up, during the time of plenty, great quantities of corn in store: so far all is well. When the inhabitants of the land, oppressed by famine, applied to him for food, he first extorted from them whatever money they were possessed of; and when they were thus impoverished by him, he demanded their cattle in exchange for bread: having become master of their flocks and herds, nothing was left for them to offer in exchange for food, but their lands and their bodies. The minister of Pharaoh scrupled not to add one calamity to another, and, without any signs of pity or remorse, taking advantage of the situation of the unfortunate, deprived the miserable Egyptians of all their lands, and reduced a free people to the abject condition of slaves, for no other crime than



than their poverty. This is the conduct which is held out as an ample vindication of the slave-trade! The worst action upon record of an unenlightened Patriarch (unenlightened, I mean, when compared with Christians), is pointed to as an example for Christians to imitate! for Christians, who cannot read a page in that book which contains their religion, without finding such inhumanity, as that displayed by Pharaoh's minister, condemned and reprobated. Yet, says the Researcher, Joseph continued to be in high favour with God, after the transactions above mentioned, nor is he so much as once reprehended on account of them: which plainly shews that all which he had done was right and acceptable with God. Q. E. D.

Moses,



Moses, the law-giver of the Jews, I suppose, the Researcher will allow, was as great a character as Joseph; yet Moses had been guilty of shedding human blood; notwithstanding which, he was in high favour with God after that transaction, nor was he ever, as far as my recollection of his history reaches, so much as once reprehended by the Almighty on account of it; which plainly shews, that, in shedding man's blood, he did what is right and acceptable with God! A precious mode of reasoning! Every sensible man sees, in both these instances of Joseph and Moses, that their numberless good qualities atoned for their faults, and that God graciously overlooked some crimes committed by his most faithful servants, even though those crimes were really heinous in themselves.

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The Researcher is not contented with representing the Almighty as an approver of the before-mentioned transaction of Joseph, but lugs in the Psalmist also as even celebrating it; these are his words: "The very transaction we are speaking of, when rehearsed by one of the inspired writers, a man according to God's own heart, is so far from being taxed with the least intimation of guilt in any one circumstance attending it, that the whole process, without any exceptions whatever, is there represented as the effect of that divine wisdom with which he was inspired from above." An absolute falsehood! The Researcher refers his readers to Psalm cv. ver. 16—24, where not one word is to be found of this transaction between Joseph and the Egyptians, not even the most remote allusion to it. The historical facts related  
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in Psalm cv. ver. 16—24, are the famine in the land of Canaan, and the providential deliverance of Jacob and his sons by the hand of Joseph!

### LAW OF MOSES.

In the third place, the law of Moses is quoted, as a sufficient vindication of the Slave-Trade.

The same Almighty Being, who is the Author of the laws of nature, can suspend those laws at his pleasure; he can arrest the stars in their course, and command the sun and the moon to stand still in the midst of heaven. He has the same sovereign power over the moral world. He can control the affections of the human heart; he can command the fond parent to lift up his hand to slay his son\*: He can command the

\* The case of Abraham.

tender husband to deprive of life the beloved wife of his bosom \* ; He can command one nation either to reduce another nation to a state of perpetual slavery, or to put all its inhabitants to the sword, and to destroy, with undistinguishing fury, the guilty and the innocent † ; and that, even though they had not been the aggressors, or made depredations on the property of others. All those acts are abhorrent from the feelings of humanity ; yet, even in such trying cases, when God commands, it is our duty to obey. Whenever there is any appearance of severity in any of the divine decrees, we ought always to remember that God, as the sovereign dispenser of every blessing, has a right to set what limits he pleases to the duration of those blessings ; and, for,

\* See Deuteronomy, chap. xiii. ver. 6.

† The case of the Amalekites.

any hardships which the innocent suffer in this world, will assuredly recompense them in a future state.

But, though I allow that in the trying cases above mentioned, when God commands, it is our duty to obey; yet I affirm, that nothing less than the divine command, or at least permission, can authorise the commission of all or either of these acts.

The children of Israel were undoubtedly authorised, by their law, to buy slaves of the Heathen, and to retain them as such perpetually, and their children after them; and I will not scruple to allow, that they therefore did right when they trafficked in human flesh. I will also allow, that they did right when they put the Amalekites to the sword, destroying them without distinction of

age or sex, embruing their hands in the blood of the innocent infant and suckling, and not even sparing the ox or the sheep, the camel or the ass. But will the Researcher say, that it is now lawful for this nation thus utterly to destroy the inhabitants of another nation less powerful than itself, because it was once lawful for the Israelites to do so? If he will not say so, why should he affirm, that it is at present lawful for this nation to traffick in human flesh, because such a traffick was expressly allowed to the Jews? Neither of these acts can be lawful without the express command, or at least permission, of God. There is a good, though often a latent, reason for every thing that God does, or suffers to be done: If it be not presumption, it does not seem difficult to conjecture some of the reasons which  
might



might incline the Supreme Being to authorise slavery amongst the Jews. It is well known to those who are conversant in the Scriptures, how prone that people were to forget God their deliverer, who freed them from a state of bondage: to prevent such ingratitude, what so likely, as the having continually before their eyes men in the very abject state from which they had been delivered? What so likely to confirm them in their obedience to his commands; to make them continue sincere worshippers of the great God of Heaven and Earth, and, amidst an irreligious and idolatrous world, preservers of the doctrine of the Unity; the great end of all his wonderful dealings with this people? If any one should object, that for the Almighty to command, or even to permit, vast numbers of innocent and unoffending men



to be subjected to so abject a state as that of perpetual slavery, is a contradiction to all our ideas of the divine attributes of justice and mercy; it may be answered, That the Supreme Being may, consistently with those attributes, tolerate the existence of a lesser evil, that he may, by that means, produce a greater good; and that he may suffer the innocent to be oppressed and afflicted in this life, because he can and will recompense them in a future state. And, in fact, according to the usual course of Providence, many of the most virtuous of men have been, in all ages of the world, the most miserable; a prey to poverty, to disease, to cruelty and oppression, to sorrow and dejection of heart, to calamities, perhaps sometimes not less grievous than that of slavery. In all such cases, it is sufficient to say, that this life is a state of trial, and not of retribution.

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But though it be allowed that the Almighty may, consistently with justice, authorise the slavery of part of the human species, because he can recompense the innocent sufferers in another world; yet it may safely be affirmed, that no power, less than Almighty, can lawfully give authority to one nation to make slaves of another nation, because no power less than Almighty can recompense the sufferers\*.

### J O S H U A.

As a fourth proof of the lawfulness of slavery, the Book of Joshua is cited.

The Researcher, in his zeal to vindicate the slave-trade, hath actually, ac-

\* What recompense can the British Parliament make to those miserable Africans, who, in consequence of its most unjust and inhuman sanctions, are reduced to a state of wretchedness too horrid to be described?

cording to his mode of proof, demonstrated that Joshua had involved himself in the guilt of perjury. Let us examine this matter. To deal candidly with my Author, I will quote his own words verbatim. "They," the Gibeonites, "made a league and a treaty of peace and amity with Joshua and his people; and, by virtue of this national treaty, which was confirmed to them with the solemn sanction of an oath, and never annulled, but rather ratified in the sequel by God himself, they were exempted from the general doom, and became, in every sense of the word, free allies and friends to the Children of Israel." In the next page the Author thus expresses himself: "We find that the Gibeonites were all consigned by Joshua to perpetual slavery, unto this day; that is, with all their posterity; notwithstanding

standing they had every claim, by virtue of the recent treaty they had so solemnly concluded with him and his people, to all the privileges and franchises of free allies." The Researcher's account of this matter may be thus summed up in form of syllogism:

Joshua confirmed by oath a solemn league made with the Gibeonites, entitling them to the privileges and franchises of free allies.

But Joshua, in defiance of this league, reduced the Gibeonites to a state of slavery.

Therefore Joshua incurred the guilt of perjury.

The Almighty, as usual, is here introduced approving of this conduct of Joshua; that is, horrid to say! according to the Researcher's account of the  
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matter, approving of his treachery and perjury ! Fortunately for the character of Joshua, his behaviour in this case has been most egregiously misrepresented. The Scripture account of the matter is this : “ And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, *to let them live* ; and the princes of the congregation sware unto them\*.” Here is not a word of privileges and franchises of free allies ; Joshua simply made a league with them to let them live. As the Author produces nothing worthy of further notice under this head, it is not necessary to dwell any longer upon it.

### CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION.

The Author derives his fifth proof of the legality of the slave-trade from the New Testament.

\* Joshua, chap. ix. ver. 15.

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That retaining the persons of men in a state of slavery, is a practice inconsistent with the spirit of the Christian faith, and has generally been considered as such, appears evident from this single fact; that slavery hath actually been abolished by Christians in almost every part of Christendom. This is a stubborn fact, let the Researcher account for it, if he can, upon other principles\*.

Had Christians considered themselves as having a right to retain men in slavery, and regarded the persons of their fellow-creatures as much their property as any of their possessions, it can never be supposed that they would universally agree to give up what they thus considered they had a right to keep.

\* A milder species of slavery is still said to exist in Hungary, Poland, and some parts of the Russian Empire, in countries comparatively barbarous, who have little more of Christianity among them than the name.

That



That to traffick in human flesh is not formally prohibited in the New Testament, is acknowledged; it is true also of some other crimes, that they are not expressly forbidden by the Christian religion: and what then? no reasonable man will infer, that this amounts to an approbation of either the one or the other; especially when he considers, that, in general terms, philanthropy, tenderness, pity and compassion, are most strongly enjoined, and that every vicious action in general, every evil thought, is severely condemned by the religion of Christ.

The divine Saviour trusted the abolition of slavery to the benign principles of his religion; and judging from the excellence and humanity of its precepts\*,

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\* The Liverpool merchants, and all who are concerned in that nefarious traffick, the African slave-



he had, no doubt, a presentiment of the good effects which they would produce in the lives and manners of men; and foresaw, that as Christianity would soften, would humanize the heart of man, so it would gradually check, and in the end abolish, many inveterate customs which had taken such fast hold upon the human mind, that they could only be abolished by insensible degrees: and, for this reason, he neither in express terms commanded an instant abolition of slavery himself, nor gave it in

slave-trade, instead of suffering their consciences to be lulled asleep by Mr. Harris's destructive opiates, will do well to reflect with horror on this dreadful sentence: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not." Alas! how exactly is the behaviour of the slave-trader, and slave-holder, to the poor afflicted negro here delineated!

charge

charge to his disciples to do so. Had he taken a different method, and set out with enjoining an universal emancipation of slaves, he would have prejudiced the minds of men against the Christian faith, and rendered them averse to embrace a religion, which attempted to deprive them of what they then thought their property.

How little the spirit of tyranny and oppression accorded with the principles of the earliest Christians, and how little inclined they were to make or to continue such invidious distinctions as those of masters and slaves, appears evident from the account which an inspired writer gives concerning them and their behaviour to each other : “ All that believed,” says he, “ were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions

possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need\*.”

The disciples of Christ, having no positive command in this case, would have been unskilful advocates for the Christian faith, if they had opened their commission, by proclaiming to all the world, that men must not only give up their vices, but great part of their property too, at least what they considered as such, in order to their admission to the religion of Jesus Christ. St. Paul, in particular, who knew the world, and was a man of address, had too much judgment to risque the very existence of Christianity, by making such claims upon men as he was confident would not be granted. This being the case, nothing remained for the Apostles, but to endeavour, for the

\* Acts, chap. ii, ver. 44.

present,

present, to mitigate the evil of slavery, by recommending it to masters to treat their servants with humanity, and by advising servants to be diligent and obedient to their masters, as the most likely means to procure kind usage.

Still I insist on this fact: that slavery has been in general abolished in Christendom; and I shall always attribute that abolition to that justice\*, that hu-

\* Wonderful revolutions are brought about in this world in a series of years. Who can say that, in some future period, the inhabitants of Negroland may not make reprisals, and send ships over from Africa, to transport all the Englishmen they can seize into a state of slavery? Let us suppose them ravaging the coast of Lancashire, and carrying off as many of the good people of Liverpool, as they could lay their hands on:—Is there any merchant amongst them all, who would not then see, as clear as day-light, that such a conduct is unjust; and that, to force men into a state of perpetual slavery, is, beyond all possibility of doubt, contrary to the sacred laws of nature?

manity,

manity, that pity, that compassion, that tenderness of heart, that love of mankind, which are enjoined in every page of the Gospel, till I am informed what other cause could possibly produce such an effect.—

There is no maxim in morals or religion more certain than this, that every man is obliged, as far as his power extends, to endeavour to promote the universal happiness of the world: I leave it with the Researcher to determine, whether he, who is an avowed advocate of slavery, is likely to be instrumental in promoting this universal happiness.

The world has been greatly indebted to learning and religion, for the light which they have thrown on the subject of the rights and privileges of man-

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kind, and for the many comforts which are consequent to the discoveries made by that light: for once, however, learning and religion have been seen employed in an unnatural attempt to destroy those rights and privileges:—Humanity shudders at the sight, and Piety must blush, when, in an advocate of slavery, she beholds a minister of the merciful Jesus!

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### P O S T S C R I P T.

It is hoped that some errors, if not of great importance, will be forgiven the Author, as this Answer to the Rev. Mr. HARRIS's Publication, was really written in great haste.



F I N I S.



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